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THE COMPOSITE CHARACTER OF ISRAEL.

By WALTER M. PATTON, PH.D.,
Middlefield, Conn.

A RECENT writer has made the statement that "Israel was led to mingle with other nations as perhaps no other nation before or since has mingled with the world at large, and it may not be inappropriate to suggest that this fact, with those that accompany it, explains, as nothing else can explain, Israel's peculiar place in the world today."¹ The position here taken can be supported as well from the Old Testament itself as from the monuments and other external sources.

In the Old Testament traditions the kinship of Israel with the nations round about is often asserted, and the explanations of the fact which are given make it clear that Israel believed the right of connubium to have existed between her earliest forefathers and their neighbors of other tribes. This may be inferred from the traditions which say that the patriarchs married wives of another race, and probably also from the accounts which trace to them non-Israelitish peoples. Examples of these two cases are: (a) Foreign marriage: Abram marries Hagar an Egyptian and Keturah a south Arabian;² Isaac the son of Abram the Hebrew, marries an Aramæan woman of nearly related race, and his son Jacob repeats his action;³ Joseph becomes the ancestor of the greater part of the Hebrew nation through the two sons of his Egyptian wife, Asenath;⁴ Moses's wife was Zipporah, a woman of Midian,⁵ and from her son the priests who served the northern Danites until the captivity of the land in 721 B. C. are said to have descended.⁶ The case of Shechem who marries Jacob's daughter Dinah is enough to show that outsiders might marry Hebrew women likewise. (b) Foreign off-

¹ BIBLICAL WORLD, March, 1902, p. 166.

² Gen. 16:15; 25:1.

³ Gen., chaps. 24 (J), 29 (E).

⁴ Gen., chap. 41 (E).

⁵ Exod. 2:21 (J).

⁶ Judg. 18:30.

spring: the children of Abram and Hagar and of Abraham and Keturah are non-Hebrew tribes of the region south of Palestine and of Arabia;⁷ Noah is the father, not only of Shem, but of Japheth and Canaan (Ham) as well;⁸ Isaac's elder son, Esau, is the father of the group of non-Hebrew peoples bordering on Canaan to the south.⁹ The fact that these genealogical lists and narratives are highly artificial does not do away with the later belief that Israel as a nation was not of pure origin, and that the practice of foreign marriage was a primitive usage. This belief, when viewed in the light of Israel's custom in historical times, in all likelihood represents facts. The Hebrew tradition makes it a matter of necessity almost that Israel should from the start have been of mixed character as a people. We may not interpret the prophet Ezekiel's word¹⁰ too literally, but still he is but speaking his nation's own belief in its mixed origin when he says: "Thus saith the Lord God unto Jerusalem: Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of the Canaanite; the Amorite was thy father and thy mother was an Hittite." Wherever we may place the beginning of the Hebrew nation, we have the same situation to face: the Hebrews in a minority and obliged to accommodate themselves to the powerful influences of their environment. It is of small consequence whether we begin with Abraham, Jacob, or Moses, as far as Israel's ability to live as a separated people is concerned. In any case this would have been practically impossible to her.

Nor was it merely by settlement among strangers that the purity of Israel as a race was endangered. The Old Testament shows that large bodies of people were admitted into the Hebrew nation, as, for example, the Kenites,¹¹ a Midianite tribe to which Moses was related by marriage, and the Canaanites of the district of Gibeon.¹² Moreover, intermarriage between Israel and her neighbors continued all through her history, despite the efforts that were made to put a stop to the practice. For the time after Moses and Joshua this is attested by the book of Judges.¹³ For the period of the monarchy we have especially strong testimony

⁷ Gen., chap. 25.⁹ Gen., chap. 36.¹¹ Judg. 1:16.¹² Josh., chap. 9.⁸ Gen., chap. 9.¹⁰ Ezek. 16:3.¹³ Judg. 2:21 — 3:6; chap. 14.

in the royal marriages of David, Solomon, and Ahab to foreign women.¹⁴ It was common after the return from exile, when Ezra and, later, the civil governor Nehemiah, sought to reform the custom as a social abuse.¹⁵ The prophet Malachi admits the existence of mixed marriages and takes the same attitude toward them that is taken by his contemporaries Ezra and Nehemiah.¹⁶ The attempted reform was not permanently successful, as we can see from the writing of such a book as Esther in the second century B. C., and also from the admission to canonical regard of such a book and of such other Scriptures as the book of Ruth and the narratives which relate the mixed marriages of Israel's greatest saints and leaders. It is significant that neither the earliest nor the latest codes of law¹⁷ contain the prohibition of mixed marriages which is found in the prophetic history of the Jehovist¹⁸ and in the prophetic legislation of Deuteronomy.¹⁹ And it is just in the prophetic period that a fruitless sentiment against the practice arose, only to settle down in time to a recognition of the inevitable.

The law codes indicate the presence of strangers who were settled in the midst of Israel and make provision for the safeguarding of their rights²⁰. In the region beyond Jordan there were many strangers, though they were practically all of Semitic race. The southern country of Judah in the early time received accessions of immigrant Semites from the wilderness to the south, and was to some degree influenced by the mingling of a Philistine element with its own population. It was in the north more especially that foreign elements threatened the purity of the Hebrew stock, however. Here was found the region called "the district of the foreigners," or, technically, "Galilee of the Gentiles."²¹ The contempt in which the mixed population of

¹⁴ 2 Sam. 3:3, 27; 1 Kings 11:1; 16:31.

¹⁵ Ezra 9:1, 2; Nehemiah, 13:23, 27. ¹⁶ Mal. 2:11 ff.

¹⁷ The Book of the Covenant and the Priests' Code.

¹⁸ Exod. 34:16.

¹⁹ Deut. 7:3; Josh. 23:12, 13.

²⁰ Exod. 20:9; 22:21; 23:9; Deut. 24:17 ff., *cf.* 10:19; Lev. 19:33, 34; 16:29.

²¹ Isa. 9:1.

Galilee was held is familiar to readers of the gospels. The parts of Samaria suffered likewise from a regular influx of strangers, but more from the foreign population which Sargon II. imported into the country after his overthrow of the northern kingdom.²² So far did the Samaritan type depart in time from the Jewish that there is a certain naturalness in the attitude of the Jew who would have no dealings with these Samaritan neighbors. The Samaritan was an object of contempt, because he was a much less pure Hebrew than his Jew half-brother.

In the bondage in Egypt and in the Babylonian exile some of the Hebrews were subjected to influences which probably determined to some extent the future character of the race. We have reason to believe that in the time of the bondage intermarriage between Hebrews and Egyptians was not unknown. The story of Joseph's marriage looks in that direction. For the same practice in the exile we have the fact of the complete naturalization of many Jews in Babylonia, and the late testimony of the book of Esther.

The Old Testament is full of evidence showing how intimately Israel stood related to her neighbors. Canaan was an Amoritic and Canaanitish land when Israel entered it as an Aramæan people.²³ Probably her language was not very different from that spoken in the land; but, however that may have been, in process of time she became Canaanitish in speech, and her classical literature is practically all in that Canaanitish dialect which we call Hebrew. The characters in which it was originally written were the Canaanitish Old Hebrew characters and not the Aramæan, as in later copies. The Canaanite made his influence upon the Hebrews felt in other directions as well. Prophecy, law, and history bear witness to the importation of Canaanite modes of thought and Canaanite usages into the sphere of Israel's religious life.²⁴ It did not take a great many centuries for Israelite, Canaanite, and Amorite to become indistinguishable one from another in the one people which they became. Probably the assimilation had been completed when

²² 2 Kings 17 : 24.

²³ Gen. 24 : 4 ; Deut. 26 : 5.

²⁴ Hosea 4 : 12 ff ; Isa. 2 : 6-9 ; Deut. 12 : 2-4 ; Judges *passim* ; etc.

the Jehovist writer composed his great history in the eighth century B. C. His work speaks of the "Canaanite in the land" as something long past.²⁵ To the prophet Amos a little later the Amorites are naught but a fabulous race of the long ago.²⁶ Soon after this, a reformation of religion throughout Judah, and apparently beyond its limits, was undertaken by Hezekiah. We may assume that this presupposes a homogeneous population. That he met with opposition which prevented complete success does not indicate that there were any of the old non-Hebrew elements still having distinct existence, but simply that the religious condition of the people had not advanced sufficiently to be ready for his undertaking. Josiah a few generations later found them prepared for a much more thoroughgoing effort at reformation. In the resistance to invasions from the side of Syria and Assyria the Old Testament does not, any more than the monuments, suggest that there were any lines of division in the population of either the northern or the southern kingdom.

The Old Testament shows Israel in the later period of her history under the influence of another people, and this time, strangely enough, her ancient kindred, the Aramæans. From the time that the Aramæan tribes had come up from the desert and settled in Palestine and Syria in the middle of the second millennium B. C., there had been a continuous line of Aramæan settlement from the Euphrates to the borders of Arabia. In the progress of events the Aramæans of Palestine were differentiated from those of Syria, but still, of course, had them for neighbors to the northeast. About the tenth or eleventh centuries B. C., the Aramæan peoples of Syria began to move back strongly into Palestine, with the result that about the end of the eighth century the officers of Hezekiah of Judah can profess that they are conversant with the Aramaic speech, though they imply that the common people of Jerusalem are not.²⁷ Palestine continued to receive a constant stream of Aramæan immigration, until in the third century B. C. it could be assumed that ordinary readers were able to read what was written in the Aramaic tongue. This assumption is involved

²⁵ Gen. 12:6; 13:7.

²⁶ Amos 2:9; *cf.* 2 Sam. 21:2.

²⁷ 2 Kings 18:26.

in the failure to turn into Hebrew the Aramaic portions of Ezra, and is supported by the fact that the native tongue of the author of Ecclesiastes is not Hebrew but Aramaic, and by the somewhat later fact of a part of Daniel being in the latter dialect. By the time that the Old Testament canon was closed, Aramaic was the living language of Palestine, and we may risk the conjecture that this fact had much to do with the collecting and ordering of the classical works in Hebrew which had not already been brought together in the two earlier divisions of the Old Testament, the Torah and Nebi'im. Thus the spread of Aramaic influence was one of the factors in bringing into closed and definite form the Jewish Scriptures as we possess them. Our present interest, however, lies in pointing out that the already departing purity of the Hebrew stock was still more completely buried out of sight under this Aramæan element by which it was overlaid.

The Philistines were in Palestine before the advent of the Hebrews. They were a non-Semitic group of tribes which was unable, however, to withstand the pressure of its Semitic environment and in a relatively short time lost its non-Semitic character: The tradition of the Old Testament represents the connubium as existing between Israel and the Philistines in the days of the Judges. Such at least is the testimony of the ancient Samson narratives. Intercourse between the two peoples appears to have soon become more intimate, judging from the evidence which we have for the time of the early monarchy.²⁸ In the Assyrian period the Philistines are still strong and independent of their Semitic neighbors; but when we arrive at the age of Nehemiah we find that the process of Semitizing them had gone so far that they do not appear to differ more from the Jews than do the nearly related Ammonites and Moabites.²⁹ In the New Testament period the Philistines have disappeared, and Jews are in occupation of places within their ancient domain.³⁰ Another element has thus been completely absorbed into Israel.

It would be requiring too much to ask more direct testimony

²⁸ 1 Sam. 13: 20; chap. 27; 2 Sam. 6: 10 f; 15: 18.

²⁹ Neh. 13: 23 f.

³⁰ *E. g.*, Lydda, Jamnia.

to the mingling of races which went to make up the ultimate Israel than is afforded by the biblical tradition. It is sufficient for proof, even if it be for the greater part indirect and inferential in its character. Such light as comes from external sources points also to the resultant Israel being a composite people. From the monuments we learn that the Phœnicians (Canaanites) occupied Palestine at a period as early as *circa* 3000 B. C.; that the Amorites coming later from the east entered in and occupied the interior behind the Phœnician coastland shortly after 2000 B. C.; that the Hyksos, having been expelled from Egypt, entered southern Canaan in large numbers about the end of the nineteenth century B. C.; that the Hittites, shortly afterward coming into Syria over the Taurus mountains, pressed upon the Amorites and forced them southward into the central portion of western Canaan and the corresponding district east of the Jordan. In western Canaan the Amorites founded, according to the Old Testament, a number of kingdoms, and east of the Jordan two larger ones.³¹ The monuments make it plain that the Amorites were from the time of their southward movement the most important people of inland Canaan. Even after they lived but in memory in the West, the Assyrians continued to call the west land the "Land of the Amorites." The monuments also clearly imply that the Hittites lay rather to the North and East of the Amorites, and did not enter to any considerable extent into what we know as the land of Israel. This rather confirms the impression one receives after looking closely at the Old Testament data.

The Amarna letters show us in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B. C. certain Aramæan tribes as coming in by invasion and settlement to this Amorite-Canaanite country which the Old Testament gives later to Israel. The names of these Aramæans are the Khabiri and the Suti. We may dispute as to the identity of these peoples, but as to the survival of the name Khabiri in the 'Ibhrîm (Hebrews) of the Bible it does not seem necessary to dispute. The Egyptian records mark the coming of the Philistine combination of tribes under the group

³¹ Cf. Josh. 10:5; Numb. 21:21.

name "sea peoples," and show that they occupied the southern maritime plain in the twelfth century B. C. There is no indication of the Hebrew conquest of Canaan found outside of the Old Testament, but the Assyrian records are clear on the existence of Israel as an important principality in central Palestine in the beginning of the ninth century B. C., and equally so on the existence of the kingdom of Judah in the middle of the next century. It must also be assumed that where the cuneiform records speak of Israel and Judah they imply populations which are relatively homogeneous at least, and not merely a heterogeneous aggregation of the old elements, Canaanite, Amorite, and Aramæan-Hebrew. When we come to the time when Aramaic culture and speech prevailed in Canaan, such external information as we can command implies that old lines of division according to race had largely faded away. There remained only the distinction between a better and a worse type of Aramæan, with a corresponding better and worse in the respective varieties of speech which were in use. Whatever of Israel there was in the New Testament age had within its territorial sphere in Canaan taken up into itself all the ancient tribes, and so produced the last Israel that ever knew national existence as such. The Samaritans alone were barred out, because they had arisen in the period of Israel's particularism. Had it not been for that fact, they would doubtless have been absorbed as easily as Philistines and other peoples came to be. However, outside of Jewry the fond discrimination between Jewish Aramæans and Samaritan Aramæans was not so easily learned or so strongly held.

There was in the very earliest period of Semitic settlement outside of Arabia a Babylonian control of Syria and Palestine. There is no sufficient reason, however, for assuming that there was any general movement on the part of the Babylonians to occupy the west permanently. The nature of the Amarna correspondence, and the analogy of the later Assyrian and Babylonian dominion in Syria and Canaan, are against an early occupation of the soil on the part of the Babylonians. In the case of Egypt's early political relations to Palestine we must come to a similar conclusion. The Egyptians ruled, but did

not settle in the country. There may have been here and there sporadic settlement on the part of both the Babylonians and Egyptians, but this can hardly have constituted any important determining factor in the development of the later population of the country. When the Scythian invasion occurred in the seventh century B. C., it did not molest Israel—or, as it was then, Judah—though it perhaps left behind in a few places a handful of straggling settlers. At Beth-shean, which later came to bear the name of Scythopolis, there may have been a larger body who remained behind. There is, however, no sign that these Scythians ever were considered as an important influence in later history, and they are not known to have retained permanently their national character, though in the time when 2 Maccabees was written the author of that book distinguishes the Scythopolitans from the Jews.³²

After this rapid sketch of the facts which illustrate the composite character of the Hebrew people, we may fittingly draw two or three inferences from all that has been said. The Hebrew is a Semite beyond all question, but he is the least faithful of all Semites to the Semitic type and the least constant in his own race features. Does the fact appear strange in view of his ancient history? The spirit of exclusive Judaism is antagonistic to the facts of its own career. When Christ and the rabbis stood side by side, the former only was true to the spirit of Israel's past. He found it necessary to break with the Jewish Church in order to be true to the facts and teachings of his nation's ancestry. The missionary spirit of Christianity is in harmony with the relatively universal character of the Hebrew race. The Jew can be a citizen of any country, because many countries have made him what he is.

³² 2 Macc. 12 : 30.